

Healthy Eating PSE Projects in K-12 Schools

Summary of Key Findings

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR OBESITY PREVENTION STUDY

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The Building Capacity for Obesity Prevention Project (BCOP) is a partnership between Case Western Reserve University, Mary Ann Swetland Center for Environmental Health, and the Ohio State University SNAP-Ed program. The aim of this researcher-practitioner collaborative is to develop diagnostic tools that can be used by SNAP-Ed and other community nutrition practitioners as they implement and sustain nutrition-related policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) interventions. Currently, the targeted PSE interventions within the BCOP project include: *Farmers' Markets, Healthy Food Retail, Farm to School, Healthy Eating Policies in Childcare, and Food Pantries*. In this report, we summarize findings related to a new area of focus on PSEs in K-12 schools.

This report focuses on analysis of qualitative data collected from interviews conducted with 12 SNAP-Ed practitioners and 26 community members in nine counties in Ohio (4 rural, 5 urban) in late 2020-early 2021. It also includes feedback from consensus conferences conducted in early 2022 with 10 experts in the field of school nutrition. The data that are the focus of this report provide rich information about factors perceived to influence successful implementation of healthy eating PSE projects in K-12 schools.

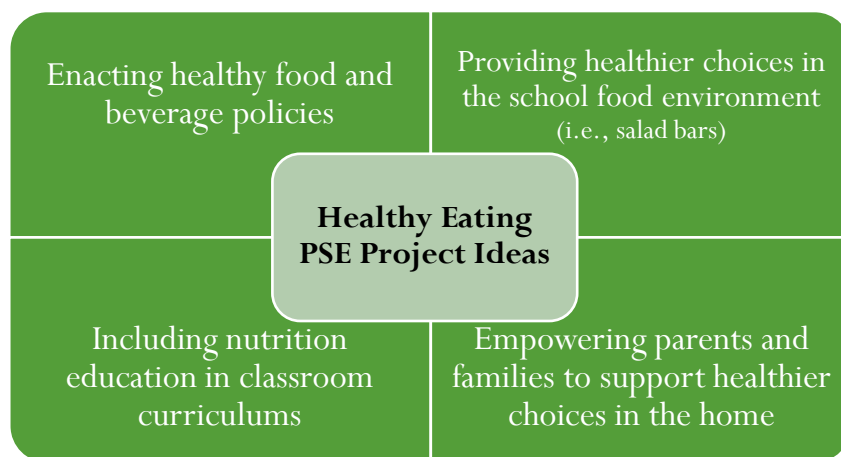


FIGURE 1. EXAMPLES OF HEALTHY EATING PSE PROJECTS IN K-12 SCHOOLS

Our study is grounded in implementation science frameworks that highlight the importance of four key domains of influence on PSE implementation including: *community readiness, practitioner capacity, obesity and food insecurity burden within communities, and socio-political context*. Our qualitative data revealed that successful healthy eating PSE projects in K-12 schools are dependent on (1) school system support and capacity; (2) the school food environment; (3) community nutrition practitioner capacity and resources, and (4) familial influence and awareness. These themes are explored further in the remaining pages.

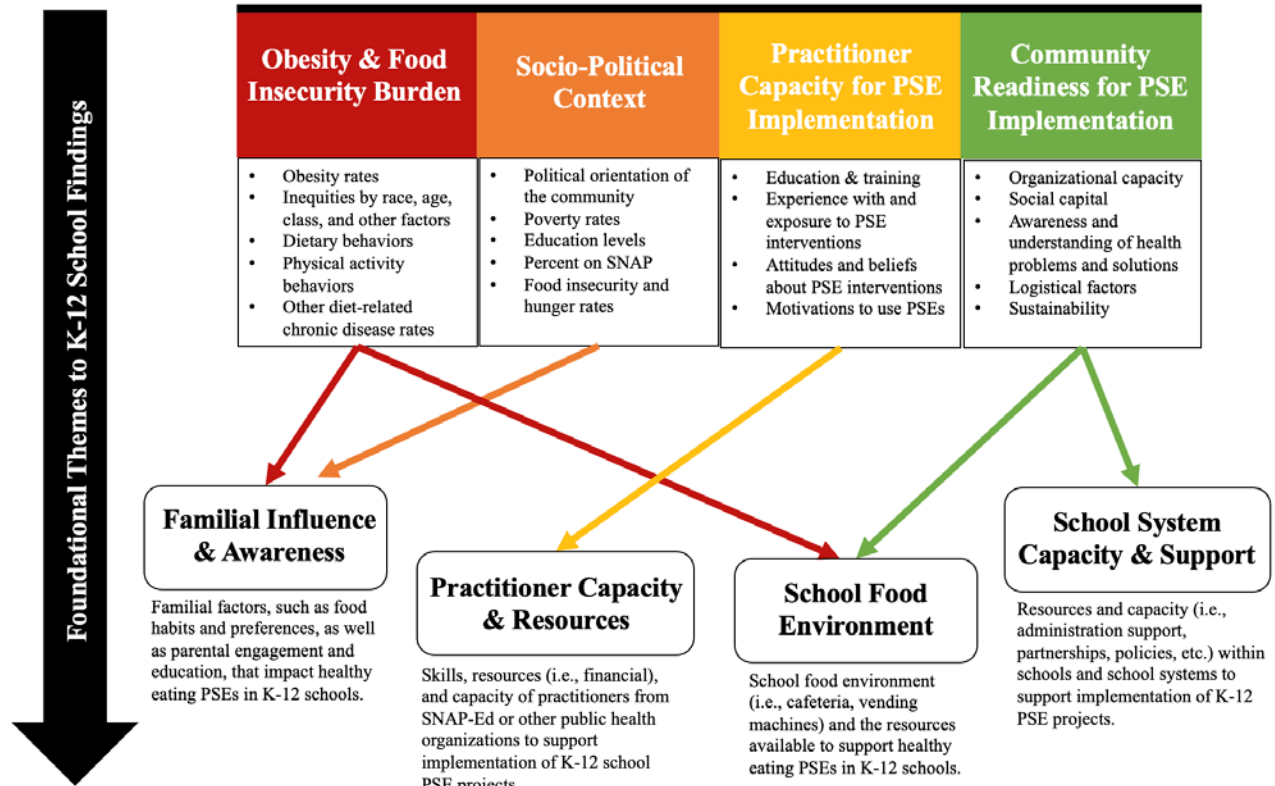


FIGURE 2. FACTORS INFLUENCING IMPLEMENTATION OF HEALTHY EATING PSE PROJECTS IN K-12 SCHOOLS.



Image: Freepik.com

Theme

Definition

Example Quote

1

School System Support & Capacity

Resources and capacity (i.e., administrative support, partnerships, policies, etc.) within schools and school systems to support implementation of PSE projects

“Well in a perfect world, [we] know exactly what we would do, but there’s all this policy and politics that are in the way when it comes to the school environment and a finite amount of time and money, budgets and energy and unions and you name it that are the roadblocks for this eating healthy.”
(SNAP-Ed Practitioner)

“...unless the PSE becomes a part of the curriculum that they can just assess along with everything else, it’s gonna be very difficult to convince teachers to do something else...” (SNAP-Ed Practitioner)

2

School Food Environment

The school food environment (i.e., cafeteria, vending machines) and the resources available to support healthy eating PSE projects

“...so many of the teachers would come and say ‘can you do something about the breakfast? It’s grab-and-go breakfast: Pop Tarts, donuts, maybe whole grain, but full of sugar, chocolate milk.’” (SNAP-Ed Practitioner)

“They have a salad station now at the middle school and high school, and they can have baked potatoes. Some days they’d run out of the salad and you can see that the kids are starting to make better choices and rather have the salad than the hot dog and things like that.”
(Resident)

3

3

Community
Nutrition
Practitioner
Capacity &
Resources

Skills, resources (i.e., financial), and capacity of community nutrition practitioners to support implementation of healthy eating PSE projects in K-12 schools

"I'm really sneaking in this Nutrition Bingo piece into my programs... I want to make it so they can't get Bingo without identifying that they ate at least one or more different types of fruit, of a different color or something..." (SNAP-Ed Practitioner)

"Our initial, first step is to try and get programming, or at least get a conversation about programming for nutrition education, and to let them feel us out, let us feel them out, and see if there's a way we can work together for something more." (SNAP-Ed Practitioner)

4

Familial Influence
& Awareness

Familial factors, such as food habits and preferences, as well as parental engagement and education, that influence healthy eating PSE projects in K-12 schools

"The parents still have to work and they're overloaded. Some of them don't have time to cook because they've got to go to work, or they're working two jobs." (Resident)

"I'm not really sure what my teenager eats in school." (Resident)

"If the kids are healthy and the parents are unhealthy, it doesn't work. You've got to put them together." (SNAP-Ed Practitioner)

Sample Indicators for Assessing Readiness and Capacity to Implement Healthy Eating PSE Projects in K-12 Schools

Once the most influential themes for successful implementation of healthy eating PSE projects in K-12 schools were identified, the BCOP team worked to create indicators that can be included in the diagnostic tool to assess readiness and capacity to implement these PSE projects in the school setting. The indicators were reviewed by leaders from SNAP-Ed as well as by experts with a background in school nutrition. Below are two sample indicators for each theme. In Fall 2022, these and related indicators will be incorporated into an online tool called [The PSE READI](#) for SNAP-Ed and other public health practitioners to use to guide action planning and goal setting.

School System Support & Capacity

- To what extent do K-12 higher ups (superintendents, board of education members, etc.) support healthy eating PSEs in the school setting?
- To what extent does the school system adhere to national, state, and/or district-level healthy eating policies?

School Food Environment

- To what extent are healthy food options available to students in the school food environment?
- To what extent do students make healthy food choices in the school food environment?

Community Nutrition Practitioner Capacity & Resources

- To what extent is K-12 PSE work highlighted as a priority within your organization (i.e., SNAP-Ed)?
- To what extent do you (SNAP-Ed or other public health practitioner) regularly engage students in nutrition education classes and activities that target healthy eating habits and healthy choices?

Familial Influence & Awareness

- To what extent are families in your service area interested in having healthy eating activities in K-12 schools?
- To what extent are families in your service area able to financially support healthy eating behaviors within their households?

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